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Soul!

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Soul! (also stylized ***SOUL!***) [1][2]) was a pioneering performance/variety television program in the late 1960s and early 1970s produced by New York City NET and PBS outlet, WNDT, which later became WNET during its run. It showcased African American music, dance and literature.[3]

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Sponsor [edit source]

The program was funded in part by the Ford Foundation, who characterized it in 1970 as "the only nationally televised weekly series oriented to the black community and produced by blacks."[4]

Line-up [edit source]

WNDT aired the first in a series of 39 one-hour programs entitled *Soul!* on Thursday, September 12, 1968. The program was video-taped inside WNDT's then-West 55th Street Studios in Manhattan. The two original co-hosts on that premier show were Alvin Poussaint, the noted black Harvard psychologist, and educator Loretta Long, who, one year later, took on the role of Susan Robinson on *Sesame Street*. Poussaint is well known for his research on racism's effect in the black community. Poussaint is a noted author, public- speaker, and television consultant. His work in psychology is influenced greatly by the civil rights movement in the South, which he joined in 1965.

The premier broadcast of *Soul!* featured singer Barbara Acklin, Patti LaBelle and the Bluebelles (Nona Hendryx and Sarah Dash), actress-singer Novella Nelson, Billy Taylor, the Vibrations singing group, gospel musician Pearl Williams Jones, and comedian Irwin C. Watson.

Poussaint and Long hosted four more shows together afterwards. On October 24, 1968, Poussaint was replaced by the show's creator, Ellis Haizlip, an openly gay African American closely associated with the Black Arts Movement.[3] Haizlip and Long would co-host the show through December 5, 1968, after which Haizlip became the sole host. Poet Nikki Giovanni was also a frequent host.[5] The show lasted until March 7, 1973.

Among the musical performers who appeared on the show were Stevie Wonder, Earth, Wind, and Fire, the Dells, Ashford and Simpson,[3] Al Green, Tito Puente, McCoy Tyner, Max Roach, Gladys Knight, The Delfonics, Kool & The Gang, Mandrill, and Black Ivory, as well as African performers Hugh Masekela and Miriam Makeba.[5] Others who appeared on the program included boxer Muhammad Ali, Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, minister (later politician) Jesse Jackson, actor / singer Harry Belafonte, actor Sidney Poitier,[5] and Kathleen Cleaver, wife of Eldridge Cleaver.[6] Legendary poetry collective The Last Poets also performed on the show.[7]

Cultural impact [edit source]

Its viewership in the African American community was enormous: a 1968 Harris poll estimated that more than 65% of African American households with access to the show watched it on a regular basis.[3] In 1970 it was carried by 72 public television stations.[4]

Gayle Wald writes that "*Soul!* offered viewers radical ways of imagining—of hearing, feeling, and seeing—black community. Musically speaking, *Soul!* refused the division of black arts into high and low culture: the music of the concert hall versus the music of the Apollo. *Soul!* made room for both…"[3]

Ivan Cury was the staff director for the program until 1970, when Stan Lathan, father of actress Sanaa Lathan, assumed the directing position. Producers included actress Anna Marie Horsford, later known for her roles in *Amen* and *The Wayans Bros.* television series. Occasional host Loretta Greene later appeared in the movies *Black Girl* and *Solomon Northup's Odyssey* in 1984, the original version of *12 Years a Slave.*

On April 22, 2018, a documentary film about Ellis Haizlip, *Mr. SOUL!*, directed, produced and written by his niece Melissa Haizlip, premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in New York, New York. The award winning film, was released in limited theaters and virtual cinemas on August 28, 2020. As of December 2020, the film has won 19 awards including 14 film festival awards.[8] [9][10] The documentary premiered on PBS on February 22, 2021.

Soul!	
Ellis Haizlip talks to Amiri Baraka in early 1970's on the set of SOUL!	
Created by	Ellis Haizlip
Country of origin	United States
Original language	English
Production	
Production company	WNDT/WNET
Release	
Original network	NET/PBS
Original release	1968 – 1973
External links	
Website	

Mr. SOUL! The Movie Premiered at The Tribeca Film Festival

Notes [edit source]

1. ^ "History: Ellis Haizlip and Soul!". *THIRTEEN - New York Public Media*. Retrieved 22 December 2020.
2. ^ C. Gerald Fraser, Ellis Haizlip, Producer, 61, Dies; Mentor to Many Black Performers, January 30, 1991, *New York Times*. Accessed online 21 April 2008.
3. ^ a b c d e Gayle Wald, Abstract for "Vibrations Strong and Mean: 'Soul!' TV and 1970s R&B", Experience Music Project 2008. Accessed online 20 April 2008.
4. ^ a b Ford Foundation Annual Report 1970, p. 55 of 102. Accessed online 20 April 2008.
5. ^ a b c WPA Film Library announces exclusive representation of groundbreaking PBS *Soul!* series, WPA Film Library Newsletter, September 2002, Volume 2. Accessed online 20 April 2008.
6. ^ James Ledbetter, *Made Possible By...: The Death of Public Broadcasting in the United States* (1997), Verso, ISBN 1-85984-029-9, p. 64.
7. ^ "[1]", SOUL! EPISODE LIST, 1968-1973, WNET, thirteen.org.
8. ^ Chiu, David. " 'Mr. Soul!' Documents Pioneering TV Show That Celebrated Blackness Through Music And Talk". *Forbes*. Retrieved 22 December 2020.
9. ^ "Mr. SOUL! - Movie Reviews". Retrieved 22 December 2020.
10. ^ "MR.SOUL! | Films | PBS". *Independent Lens*. Retrieved 22 December 2020.

External links [edit source]

- Official website
- *Soul!* at IMDb

Categories: Television series by WNET | 1968 American television series debuts | 1973 American television series endings | 1960s American music television series | 1970s American music television series | 1960s American variety television series | 1970s American variety television series | African-American culture

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